

## **Idaho students slightly above average in test results**

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BOISE (AP) - Idaho students scored slightly better than the national average in standardized test results released today.

The strongest performance by Idaho students was in fourth grade math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which measures reading and math ability in fourth graders and eighth graders.

"There's been great attention to reading and math in the last few years," said Allison Westfall, a spokeswoman for the state Education Department, noting that Idaho has its own state math assessment test.

The test is often used to compare the performance of states, ethnic groups and other segments of the population. Every state is required to take part under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Idaho doesn't get a ranking based on the NAEP scores but can compare its scores with those of other states.

Westfall said that in fourth grade math, Idaho's scores were better than those in 27 states, around the same as those in 18 states and not as high as those in four states.

In eighth grade math, Idaho's scores were higher than those in 19 states, around the same as those in 17 states and lower than those in 13 states.

In fourth grade reading, Idaho's scores were higher than those in 21 states, around the same as those in 20 states and lower than those in eight states.

In eighth grade reading, Idaho's scores were higher than those in 20 states, around the same as those in 17 states and lower than those in 12 states, according to the Education Department.

White students traditionally do better on NAEP-type standardized tests than minorities such as Hispanics or blacks, and that fact helps drive Idaho's overall scores up - because Idaho's population is around 90 percent white. When the scores of Idaho's white students were separated and analyzed, those of eighth graders in math and reading were below the national average for white students.

“You have to look at the lack of diversity in Idaho when you analyze the data and how it influences our scores when compared to states with more diversity,” Westfall said. “We don’t have the same groups that other states do.”

Data for American Indians in Idaho was included in the scores for the overall Idaho population, but that group was not separated, because not enough children were tested to give statistically significant results, the Idaho Education Department said.

Westfall said department officials were pleased about the fourth grade math scores but concerned that scores didn’t show continued improvement in eighth grade. She said the state is working to improve math performance through measures like the Idaho Math Academy, which helps math teachers learn how to improve students’ skills. The state Board of Education is also considering a plan to strengthen requirements for middle-school math and science.

The department is also concerned that Hispanic children in Idaho, while scoring about as well as their counterparts around the country, are not doing as well as they could be compared to their non-Hispanic peers in the Idaho schools.

NAEP is one of many standardized tests Idaho schoolchildren take over the years.

The tests help give structure to teachers’ plans, said Wade Carter, the principal of Emmett Junior High School.

“Standardized tests are not the answer to everything, but they give us some direction,” Carter said.

One million public school students around the country take the tests.

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